Indigenous People and Drug Abuse

THE UNITED NATIONS
INTERNATIONAL
DRUG CONTROL PROGRAMME

INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

An estimated 300 million or about 5 per cent of humankind are so-called indigenous people who inhabit about 70 countries, ranging from the cold arctic regions to the tropical rainforests of the Amazon and the deserts of Australia. In some countries such as Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala and Laos, almost half to two thirds of the population is indigenous. While there is no universally accepted definition of indigenous people, there are four major elements they commonly share: pre-existence on their territory, non-dominance over other groups, cultural difference from other groups, and self-identification as indigenous, which seems to be synonymous with "minority".

Often described as aboriginals, natives, autochtonous, fourth world, first and tribal peoples, indigenous peoples have widely varying ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Their economic life style varies from hunters and gatherers to highly developed agriculturalists and from blow-pipe hunting pygmies to highly specialized groups such as skyscraper construction workers balancing on towering steel frames over the abyss of megacities.

Contemporary indigenous people are descendants of the original inhabitants of many lands with a wide variety of cultures, religions, languages and modes of social and economic organization. More than 5,000 indigenous groups can be distinguished by such differences and geographical stratification. Some are totally isolated, others are integrated into the mainstream of society and participate fully in the culture of their national society.

Because of this highly diverse background and these characteristics, indigenous peoples defy a common definition. Their population sizes range from a few hundred as in the case of small bands of hunters to 20 million as in the case of Pashtuns, while their political structures range from the egalitarian to the aristocratic. In spite of their diversity, they face similar difficulties in this modern world such as discrimination, marginalization, oppression and displacement. Though some groups might still be expanding, globally the numbers of most of these groups are diminishing through assimilation into greater ethnic groups, or through extinction because of higher mortality rates as well as lower life expectancies.

Indigenous peoples occupy an important place in the history of humankind

and in the development of the human family. Aside from their unique value as human beings they offer a rare opportunity, through observing them, to study our own roots and perspectives. Recognizing these facts, the United Nations made promotion and protection of their fundamental rights a major objective. In December 1990, the General Assemby adopted resolution 45/164 proclaiming 1993 as the International Year for the World's Indigenous People aimed at strengthening "international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health". This Year is expected to become a milestone in the struggle of indigenous peoples to achieve recognition of their rights and equal status in their homelands.

Indigenous peoples have over the course of thousands of years developed appropriate and successful systems of land use and adequate resource management, including such specialized forms as nomadic pastoralism, shifting cultivation, agro-forestry, sedentary terrace agriculture, and hunting and fishing under the most severe climatic conditions.

Where most of present day humankind tends to seek dominion over the natural world and its resources, indigenous peoples usually favour a holistic and equitable approach that is the very core of sustainable development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations. The notion of sustainability of development, now being recognized as the basis for humanity's future survival, is for most indigenous peoples an integral part of their culture. Unfortunately, indigenous peoples themselves have also engaged in unsustainable practices. Like others living in poverty, they are often faced with a choice between short-term survival and long-term environmental health. Some groups have overhunted wildlife and dynamited fish stocks to near extinction. Some groups have cultivated marginal lands using slash-and-burn agriculture with the cycle of rotation becoming too brief for the recovery of plant growth; a practice which caused loss of top soil and erosion.

Despite all their diversity, indigenous peoples tend to face similar problems. Through the age of colonialism, the spread of non-indigenous religions and the accelerating pace of industrial development, modernization, and population growth, indigenous peoples have seen their traditional cultures eroded and their lands taken away as part of the economic coercion and political suppression to which they were subjected in most parts of the world. This has made indigenous peoples some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

United Nations human rights covenants stipulate the right of indigenous people to enjoy their own culture. ▶

United Nations actions for indigenous peoples

Since its inception the United Nations has been sensitive to the plight of indigenous peoples and has addressed numerous issues affecting their lives.

The two United Nations Human Rights Covenants of 1966 are important documents for the emancipation of indigenous peoples. These stipulate a wide range of rights, including non-discrimination and the right of peoples to self-determination and to natural resources; the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion and to use their own language.

In 1982, recognizing the specific problems faced by these peoples, and the urgent need to arrest degeneration and discrimination, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations was established with the aim of preparing a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and reviewing governmental policies on the promotion and protection of their human rights. In the meantime, the Working Group has become the focal point of global activity for promoting the rights of indigenous peoples. Over the years more and more representatives of indigenous peoples and of their associations have participated in the meetings and discussions and have made their presence felt. Within a mere decade, the style of debates has changed fundamentally. Previously, matters concerning indigenous peoples were discussed solely by non-indigenous people but now representatives of indigenous peoples speak up for themselves. With a growing self-confidence and the assurance of being heard and taken seriously, they enter the international forums.

The 1993 International Year for the World's Indigenous People came about at the request of indigenous organizations and is largely the result of their efforts to secure their cultural integrity and status. It aims, above all, to encourage a new relationship based on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between States and indigenous peoples, and between the international community. The Year thus provides an unprecedented opportunity for the international community to examine existing injustices—and to forcefully demonstrate its commitment to helping indigenous peoples fully realize their rights.

Overall, it is hoped that the designation of 1993 as the International Year for the World's Indigenous People will generate greater understanding and cooperation towards eliminating discrimination against indigenous peoples and provide solutions to the obstacles and constraints faced by their communities.

Indigenous peoples and drugs

Opium was used primarily to alleviate pain.

Superior knowledge of medicinal plants and drugs

Most of the 7,000 natural compounds used in modern medicine have been employed by traditional healers for ages. An estimated three quarters of the world's plant-based pharmaceuticals, including such basic ones as aspirin and quinine, have been derived from medicinal plants found in areas populated by indigenous peoples and were discovered following leads from indigenous medicine.

Indigenous peoples, who have lived for tens of thousands of years in their habitats, know far more about their plants and how to use them than most outsiders. Through thousands of years of intimate contact with the flora surrounding them, indigenous peoples have discovered the mind-altering properties of many plants. These active ingredients are ingested in various ways such as smoking, inhaling or drinking. Many such plants are only effective after a specific processing regimen. The ways these drugs are used and the rituals that control their use are manifold. Indigenous populations have used drugs for medical purposes since the earliest times.

It can be assumed that indigenous peoples who, over the millennia have assembled an array of healing and medicinal plants, are the ones to most clearly understand the mental effects of these drugs on themselves. Naturopathic and magico-religious medicine is used for ailments of body and soul. Herbal medicine and unusual healing techniques combine to help the indigenous individual and community regain balance.

Limited cultural use of mind-altering drugs

Traditionally, the use of drugs by indigenous populations was not open to every member of the group. Rather, it was limited to specialists and primarily encompassed controlled use for religious and health objectives. Sometimes, culturally sanctioned drugs were used to induce altered states of mind.

Religious practices, used to explain the world and the cosmos and mediate between humans, animals and supernaturals were often complex and required expert intermediaries (such as shamans) between these worlds. One purpose of taking these mind-altering drugs was to give the user contact with the spirit world: vivid hallucinations were taken as visits from the spirits. This precarious journey was often performed under the use of hallucinogenic drugs which were taken solely for this purpose and in exactly regulated dosage, as the state of special consciousness ("shamanistic awareness") reached through ingestion might be dangerous and required the performer and his community to follow strict teboos and restrictions. In such techniques, use of drugs was regimented and controlled, not for pleasure but for the exclusive purpose of religious practices. Only under such conditions could the shamans meaningfully interpret their experience of intoxication as communication with otherwise unreachable ancestors or spirits.

The use of hallucinogenic drugs is particularly common in American cultures, in particular in the tropical and subtropical zones. Shamanic use of mushrooms that cause exotic visions has been documented for three millennia. Indigenous people prepare from a liana a psychoactive drug, one of the most powerful hallucinogens (ayahuasca, meaning "vine of the soul", "vine of the dead" in Quechua). Men drink this drug on ceremonial and social occasions to attain colourful, intense and sometimes frightening visions which bring them into contact with the supernatural. The effects from ingesting this drug last for several hours and form the basis of the shamanic view of reality and is shared by the initiates.

In some indigenous societies the use of certain drugs for ritualistic purposes by particular or all members of the group is a precondition to their successful mastery of strains and crises in communal and individual life, the seasonal cycle and the course of history as well as most major challenges of their life.

Coca chewing (acullico) has been used only as a stimulant, but also as a powe appetite suppressant.

Escalating indigenous drug abuse

Like distilled alcohol, heroin and cocaine are modern high-purity drugs, derived from plants with a long history of indigenous use. Coca has been used in rituals and religious occasions: yet, traditionally, it was used not only as a stimulant, but as a food containing vitamins and minerals, and as a powerful appetite-suppressant. Opium was used primarily to allievate pain. They were potent yet natural drugs. Yet in their modern synthetic forms, these drugs contribute dramatically to the escalating indigenous drug problem.

When distinguishing between use and abuse of drugs one has to understand the dynamics of drugs and society. Use of the same drug might have been positively sanctioned in one society and at one period in history, and negatively by another society in another period. Compulsive dependent use was at one time defined exclusively in terms of physical dependence, but now the tendency is to recognize that dependence on drugs can be both physical and psychological. Its characteristic is that a clearly definable syndrome occurs upon cessation of administration of the drug.

Compulsive, dependent use can be contrasted with moderate, irregular use which is more the case with the drugs used by indigenous peoples. Special occasions and times of the day dictated the rhythm of their drug use. With the more potent synthesized drugs of today the situation has taken a turn for the worst.

Abuse of drugs as a symptom of socio-cultural alienation

Humanity's use of alcohol, derived from fermented grains, fruits, and plants, is ancient. Distilled spirits were not known till relatively recently. This discovery was a feat of the Chinese and Western civilizations. The Western discoverer of this process thought it would have a great military potential, offering an appropriate physical-mental stimulus, before battle. Alcohol became the first intoxicant to be chemically isolated. This distilled alcohol is the chief culprit in indigenous drug abuse. Alcoholism as a social and community problem seems to have been rare before the art of distillation was developed.

Once indigenous peoples had become acquainted with drugs such as distilled alcohol, they consumed it more and more in the absence of appropriate social controls. The adverse consequences of alcoholism among a high proportion of members of indigenous

groups gave an additional, often lethal, push to the distortion of indigenous culture. This state of distorted culture is often taken as representative and justification for prejudice by representatives of dominant groups.

Abuse of illicit drugs

The drugs abused and the degree of abuse varies greatly among the different groups. As is the case with non-indigenous peoples, more men than women use dependence-inducing drugs, and more young than old ones. In many cases dependence on opium is reportedly high among the poppy-cultivating groups, some groups report up to 40 per cent of the male adults to be dependent. Traditional reasons given for regular use is lack of medicines to cure chronic diseases.

Lacking the resources for treatment and awareness programmes, social security and other institutions, indigenous peoples tend to suffer more from such forms of drug abuse. Unfortunately this has been compounded in the last two decades since processed drugs such as heroin and cocaine have found their way back to indigenous peoples, so much so that today many members of poppy-growing hill tribes are injecting heroin. Because of contacts with tourists and the sharing of needles, they have begun to spread HIV/AIDS among their people. Furthermore, the first prostitutes hailing from among these tribes included many dependent upon heroin. An interesting phenomenon is represented by the fact that the reasons for taking up narcotics use in the first place have changed radically. When previously relief of pain with elder people had been the prime cause, as of recent, ever younger heroin experimenters turn to the drug for relief of stress or just seeking pleasure. Another disturbing occurrence are dealers who push heroin onto the potential users offering the first baits free of charge. Yet another phenomenon: once heroin has entered an area, usage tends to spread rapidly, families, even villages, with many dependents are not an uncommon sight. Where opium poppies have been successfully replaced by other crops, smuggled heroin has unfortunately replaced opium in the villages of the former producers. Together these factors show that this kind of drug abuse is similar to that experienced by non-indigenous peoples and this gives all the more reason to worry about and stem escalating indigenous drug abuse.

Over the last decades, modern drug abuse has spread with unprecedented speed and has reached even the most remote indigenous peoples of our planet. This is a major concern because indigenous peoples are the more vulnerable to such modern drug abuse which can enslave the user, lead to family and community breakdown, increase the escalation and diffusion of violence and crimes and produce profound social, economic and health problems.

Abuse of drugs for manipulating indigenous peoples

Throughout history, drugs have been, on occasion, deliberately utilized by dominant ethnic groups to manipulate, silence, neutralize and oppress members of weaker ethnic groups. Alcohol was one of the prime drugs misused in this respect. It was commonly offered when establishing first contacts with remote indigenous peoples in order to attract and motivate them to keep up and intensify such contacts. In situations of so-called silent trade where the partners deposited their goods intended for trading and expected the other side to

reciprocate with goods or merchandise of their own of similar value, drugs were often the goods of choice.

In particular, indigenous peoples hitherto not yet exposed to highly concentrated alcohol swiftly took to the "firewater" which was offered them. Its endemic abuse led to further and unprecedented levels of social degradation and ultimately, in some instances, to the disintegration of entire groups.

Opium and, more recently, heroin has also been used widely to make indigenous peoples dependent and thus more easily manipulated. The reasons for such devious acts were to have supplies of cheap, dependent labour for unwanted or risky tasks, or to preclude and choke off any dissent, dissatisfaction and any potential attempt at uprising of the suppressed groups.

Over the last decades, drug abuse has reached even the most remote indigenous peoples of the world.

Indigenous peoples as pawns in the illicit drug trade

Due to the fact that most indigenous peoples live on marginal lands, in higher altitudes, and in the peripheral or border areas of their respective countries, it is no easy task to grow crops sufficient for their own use or lucrative enough to be a cash crop. Only certain crops thrive in these disadvantaged locations and even fewer fulfil the demand to bring in sufficient cash. Regrettably some of the most profitable of these crops are the source of heroin and cocaine. This fact has made indigenous peoples pawns in the illicit drug traffic.

Role in the production of illicit drugs

Processing, trafficking, and peddling illicit drugs has become big business. Over time, indigenous peoples have been induced to produce ever increasing quantities of the respective plants which they had not grown before or at least not grown commercially. The profits they reap from this illegal activity are minute when compared to the street prices for the processed drugs charged in consumer areas. Their income stays well below the national average. Clearly, it is they who benefit least from the tremendous profits of the international drug traffic.

Indigenous peoples previously self-sufficient have, during the last century or so, increasingly become dependent on cash crops for supplying themselves with the means to acquire products they cannot or do not want to produce such as plastic buckets, garments and similar products. Due to the location of their lands and their agricultural techniques, their yields cannot compete with those of more mechanized and irrigated farming. They are forced to grow crops in demand such as those that produce illegal drugs.

The coca bush, the raw material of cocaine, has long been grown in the higher altitudes of South America for the domestic use of indigenous peoples. It thrives on steep hillsides in soils on which few other plants can survive and is thus an ideal crop for people who use dried and crushed coca leaves to still hunger pangs and increase endurance. Only the demands of the Western cocaine fashions have made it a commodity with a cash value. Its production areas have expanded under pressure from international drug dealers and forced cultivation frequently occurs. This, in turn, results in tropical deforestation and other severe environmental damage.

Opium is another example. This drug is produced through cultivating poppies

Often indigenous people have been involved as carriers in the trafficking of illicit drugs.

in South-East Asia on fields used the previous season to grow maize. Hill slopes are cleared, the soil's acidity is "tasted", and the poppy seeds are sown. There is a lot of weeding and care for the fields and it is hoped that rains come when needed and not when detrimental to the crop. Family members tap the pods and collect the coagulating sap of the poppies. This raw opium is kept hidden from authorities and frequently is sold as "green crop", i.e. credits are extended to the indigenous cultivators while the crop is still in the fields, and the flowers have barely blossomed. As the tapping time coincides with the New Year festival, during which traditionally there was no activity in the fields, tapping poppies has been euphemistically renamed "collecting money". Again, environmental degradation—removal of rain forests, loss of soils and their nutrients and loss of species diversity by illicit opium poppy cultivators—is analogous to that inflicted upon their environment by illicit coca cultivators.

One generally believes that these indigenous peoples have cultivated opium poppies for thousands of years, yet the reality is that in the oral tradition of South-East Asia indigenous peoples, there is no mention of this plant. Its cultivation and tapping technique was introduced to them barely 150 years ago by agents of the respective governments and the colonial powers in order to cater to the needs of the dominant society. In some cases, like recently in Colombia, indigenous populations have been lured to cultivate opium poppy by drug traffickers while this plant had never been previously grown in that country.

The role of indigenous people in the processing of illicit drugs used to be minor, as this was done far away from the fields. Recently however, the clandestine laboratories have come closer. ▶

Role in processing and trafficking of illicit drugs

Traditionally, it was not indigenous peoples who processed illicit drugs such as cocaine and heroin: they simply supplied the source materials. Chemical agents and the technique and finances were provided by outsiders who also did the processing. The role of indigenous peoples in the processing and trafficking of illicit drugs was a minor one and usually limited to acting as carriers, muleteers and the like. Processing was done far away from the fields. Only rather recently have the laboratories come close to the fields.

Indigenous peoples are just another victim and pawn of international drug traffic: they are neither those who inspired it nor its prime beneficiaries. The fact is that they were living in remote areas ideally suited for the production of certain crops which happen to be illicit drugs destined for the world market. As it turned out, this cultivation has not only destroyed the ecological equilibrium of these regions, but also its ethnic, social and economic balance.

Some independence movements comprising members of indigenous groups have begun to process illicit drugs mainly to share in the profits, with the aim of financing arms and armies for their uprising. Frequently, the participating indigenous peoples were cajoled into joining such movements which often were a cover for the activities of the drug traffickers.

In a related development, these and other indigenous peoples were fighting proxy wars for their neighbours who may be the dominant population. Their reputed prowess and skills in tracking and shooting were misused for waging war which is a form of resolving disputes unknown to many of these groups. Sometimes indigenous peoples were set against each other. Some groups in Asia have been caught up in such fighting for half a century.

Indigenous peoples and the making of the modern drug problem

The modern global drug problem is of entirely different dimensions than that of the hallucinogenic producing plants or the medicinal drugs traditionally used by indigenous peoples.

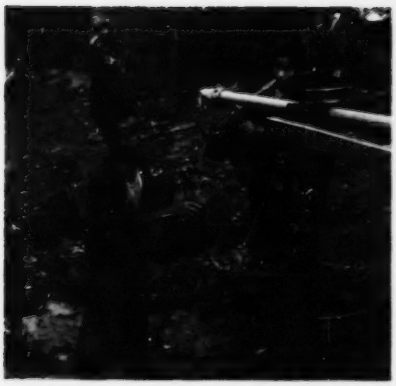
Undoubtedly, drugs have been part of cultural concerns and activities since the dawn of time. However, it was only with the advent of technologies capable of refining and concentrating the active components of plants and their preparation that drugs were separated from the

general background of cultural concerns and could become instead a scourge.

The indigenous peoples are not responsible for the drug problem. Rather they also suffer from the questionable progress humankind has achieved in concentrating drugs and enhancing their effect. These modern drugs came back like a boomerang and have hit indigenous people through rampant alcoholism, intravenous heroin use and the smoking of coca base (basuco).

UNDCP projects encompass not only the production of alternative crops, but also their marketing, and educational and health components.

Indigenous peoples and the role of UNDCP



It is a rather remarkable fact that many of the illicit drugs placed under international control under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs are being produced by indigenous peoples. This is the case with opium poppies, as well as with the coca bush, and holds true also for the cannabis plant. Therefore, indigenous peoples are both the target and beneficiary of crop substitution and alternative development projects undertaken by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). Sometimes, they are also victims of law enforcement activities striving to eradicate illicit crops in the fields or to interdict the first link in the chain of the international drug traffic, precisely the production of illicit drugs.

When the United Nations together with the host Governments launched the first such projects, criticism and disbelief were voiced by many who would not believe farmers would readily leave their profitable crop for an uncertain future without severe law enforcement actions. It is particularly to these host Governments that the international community owes its gratitude for showing so much trust and active cooperation, persistence and patience.

Since the initial pilot projects were taken up 20 years ago, the concepts of such programmes have come a long way. Today's projects of the third generation encompass not only production of alternate crops, but also their marketing, an awareness component, a socio-cultural package with educational and health components, and the promotion of appropriate integration into national society and other similar activities; hence, they promote *alternative development*.

The results in Asia and South America of these kinds of projects are gratifying. The volume of illicit production within these project areas has been brought down decisively and in many cases terminated altogether. Unfortunately, this success has been more than eroded by escalating production in other areas and new countries which have taken to production of these attractive yet illicit drugs. This serves as a forceful reminder that trying to resolve the drug issue solely from the supply side is unlikely to achieve its goals.

This is so because millions who are dependent on drugs need supply, and the profits reaped through supplying illicit drugs induces profiteers to find and create, if need be, demand. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions of indigenous people suffer from abuse of, and dependence upon, these and other drugs.

In many cases, the prime reason for taking dependence-inducing drugs such as opiates, was and still is, lack of access to or knowledge of, medical services and health facilities. Absence of treatment, facilities, or ignorance of how to successfully terminate drug dependence, sustains the habit. Therefore, the demand side of the drug equation needs to be tackled simultaneously with the supply side.

Here UNDCP has taken up the challenge with the donor community and the partner Governments through the implementation of comprehensive projects based on a balanced approach to drug abuse control. They have initiated educational awareness and prevention programmes for the people producing illicit drugs and for those already under the spell of addictive drugs, they have launched treatment and rehabilitation programmes which show initial positive results.

UNDCP has assumed a major role and a special responsibility in dealing with indigenous peoples. The new operational focus of UNDCP pertains to subregional activities, including the provision and mobilization of specialized resources in a cross-border setting. This not only bears witness to the prevailing political reality, but also to the ethnic reality, as many indigenous peoples producing illicit drugs straddle international borders.

Such projects have shown that there are indeed viable agricultural alternatives for narcotics-producing indigenous communities. However, the effective reduction of the global production of illicit drugs by indigenous peoples cannot be attempted on a project to project basis merely focusing on the respective drug.

The United Nations intends to develop a global approach to the indigenous peoples' issue, just as it intends to do with respect to the environment and drugs. The international community is ever more conscious of the fact that this long-term struggle will require considerable vision, patience, perseverance and resources. Action must be conceived in programmes and not just projects. It is in this global and coordinated approach that UNDCP has chosen to act in its future operations.

Successful tests for fruitful future co-existence

Through some of these projects, in particular those of the alternative development type, indigenous peoples and concerned government authorities were for the first time brought together at the grass-roots level and collaborated intensely to achieve their targets. This experience of fruitful cooperation has led to frank exchanges of information and opinions, and, over time, to mutual respect and trust. It has contributed to the emancipation of these indigenous peoples on the one hand, and to the process of national integration on the other.

Prejudice, mistrust, and suspicion are bound to give way once the respective players are given the opportunities and time to view each other realistically and to assess strengths and weaknesses. Joint collaboration facilitates reaching the goals of all involved—Government, indigenous peoples and the world community.

These projects also serve to test and develop new types of more sedentary agriculture for indigenous peoples and provide a learning process for market mechanisms and development of marketing skills, both indispensable for indigenous peoples to be able to establish a sustainable economy. This is pioneering work and relevant to a majority of these people, whether they grow illicit drugs or not. In view of the ever shrinking territory and agricultural land at the disposal of indigenous peoples, it is imperative to develop effective methods to grow more on less land.

A closer look at sustainable projects

Indigenous peoples sometimes have a more holistic view of the world, the appropriateness of which is increasingly appreciated by development experts. The notion of integrated rural development is closer to indigenous concepts of life, in which not only its physical and economic patterns but also its cultural, social and spiritual patterns are seen as interlinked and influencing one another.

Seemingly simple agricultural activities, such as planting a crop, are for indigenous peoples complex actions and at the same time may involve religious practices, requiring the cooperation of experienced old people and the workforce of younger adults, of animals, plants and the supernatural beings guarding over them. Songs and dances interpret agricultural activities, moon phases dictate aspects of the respective activity, and so on. Proper individual and communal behaviour, seasonal and communal ceremonies, secure that all goes well and the harvest will be a successful one. Similarly, other activities are interrelated and dependent upon each other. Each action has to be weighed carefully as there are a myriad of consequences in seemingly unrelated spheres to consider.

Through implementing projects for and with indigenous peoples, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme has over time assembled an array of valuable experiences which could be of use in situations of inter-ethnic contacts and collaboration, valid also for sustainable projects with non-indigenous peoples.

The notion of sustainability of development, now being recognized as the basis for our future survival, is for most indigenous peoples an integral part of their culture.

A future for indigenous peoples

The Year's theme: "Indigenous peoples: a new partnership" is designed to promote a new and equitable partnership between States and their indigenous peoples through enhancing their rights. Indigenous peoples are striving to preserve the right to their own future.

Coming of age of alliances of indigenous peoples

Lately indigenous peoples have begun to organize themselves and establish networks of mutual support. The activities of indigenous peoples' organizations are of relatively recent origin. They have begun uniting to resist new assaults carried out against them. Their organizations are becoming increasingly active in getting support in their struggle for survival as peoples. Indigenous movements and aspirations have found new hope that their demands are being, or will be, heard. The preferred method they adopt to achieve their goals are cooperating and collaborating with sympathetic outsiders, be it the mass media, ecological associations, human rights organizations, United Nations agencies and individuals all over the world.

The international movements of indigenous peoples have developed to defend and promote their interests in a concerted manner. Together for a common cause the international lobby of, and for, indigenous peoples is constantly advancing. Their demands are largely of two kinds: political demands for self-determination, and economic and cultural demands for land rights.

The future of mankind is bound to the environment. Harmony must be achieved with indigenous peoples. Wasteful ways of living must be rethought and we must reverse the trends in which natural and human resources are wasted.

In this respect, drugs are becoming one of the most insidious forms of pollution threatening the world today. Although we speak constantly of the issue of drugs, it is rare that we do so in ecological terms. Indeed, the link between ecology and drugs is perhaps not so evident, but it is both real and vital and the case of indigenous peoples is the prime example of that link. Drugs and pollution constitute the down side of industrial development and the consumer society. They are the bitter fruits of the frantic search for profit and the loss of reference points. They reflect the destruction of an ages-old equilibrium but without substituting a new equilibrium in its place. Mankind must therefore develop strategies capable of generating sustainable values to replace those which are destroying the very basis of our being. Viable and attractive alternatives must be offered to both users and producers of illicit drugs, as part of this process of renewal.

Where indigenous peoples live

1. Arctic
2. Sub-Arctic
3. Eastern Woodlands
4. Southeast
5. Great Plains
6. Northwest-Plateau
7. California
8. Great Basin
9. Southwest
10. Pacific Northwest Coast
11. Central America
12. Circum-Caribbean
13. Amazonia
14. Mato Grosso
15. Gran Chaco
16. W. Andean Lowlands
17. Andean Highlands
18. Patagonia-Pampas
19. North and Central Asia
20. South Asia
21. Chittagong Hill Tract Peoples
22. South East Asia
23. Sahara and Sahel
24. Southern Sudan
25. The Horn and East Africa
26. Kalahari Desert
27. Ituri Forest
28. Australia and the Pacific

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